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ZEPHANIAH.

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The prophecy of Zephaniah forms one of the smallest books of the Old Testament, but has a symmetry and an apocalyptic tone which entitle it to high rank among the oracles of the Hebrew prophets. The free appropriation of language and sentiments from Joel, Micah and Isaiah takes from it certain claims to originality, but its scope and plan are obviously the product of the writer's own independent thought, as he was moved of the Spirit to announce the word of Jahveh. That the prophet was descended from king Hezekiah (verse 1) has been a prevalent opinion since the time of Aben Ezra, and is quite probable; but there is no conclusive evidence for this opinion, and the matter is of no considerable importance.

The book is assigned to "the days of Josiah," but no more definite date is given, and the attempts of interpreters to determine the exact time of the prophecy have not been successful. Some maintain that it belongs to the earlier period of Josiah's reign, before the king had undertaken the reforms for which his administration was notable; others date it during the progress of the reforms, and others during the latter part of his long reign of thirty-one years. According to 2 Chronicles (34: 8) the reformation really began in the eighth year of Josiah's reign, and was continued with greater vigor after the discovery of the book of the law, in the eighteenth year. But notwithstanding the violence of the king's measures, and the temporary suppression of idolatrous usages, it was a notorious fact that the false worship was not effectually destroyed. It revived and flourished again immediately after Josiah's death, and 2 Kings 23: 26-29, together with the whole testimony of Jeremiah's prophecies, is evidence that the Baal worship and other idolatrous practices were not abol-

ished, but at most only driven into secret, by the rigid measures of the pious King of Judah and those who were associated with him in the work of reform. Hence the mention of such idolatry as is referred to in Zeph. 1: 4-6 is no certain proof that the prophecy was uttered before Josiah's reforms, nor is the expression "remnant of Baal" (chap. 1: 4) any sufficient evidence that the worship of Baal had already in great part been destroyed. As well might one argue that the words "remnant of the house of Judah" in chap. 2: 7, prove that the Jews were already in exile. In short the prophecy of Zephaniah would fit either the beginning or the close of Josiah's reign. If it were made before the reforms, the allusions to existing idolatry and wickedness would have been very natural and direct. But if made towards the close, about the time that Pharaoh-necho marched against the Assyrians (2 Kings 23: 29), these same allusions would have been sufficiently pertinent, for to every man of the kingdom, gifted with the discerning insight of Zephaniah, it must have been apparent that the false worship had only concealed its face for a time, and was not really abolished. Comp. 2 Kings 23: 26-28. If obliged to express a judgment where certainty is not attainable, we prefer on the whole the later date. This judgment is based, not on particular allusions like those above referred to, but on the apocalyptic tone of the whole prophecy, which may well be supposed to have been prompted by the military movements of the great nations on the south and north just before the fall of Assyria, and the deep conviction that nothing short of national overthrow and captivity would eradicate the deeply-rooted evils of the kingdom of Judah. In the signs of the times the prophet recognizes the imminent "day of Jahveh," day of dense darkness and overwhelming wrath.

The prophecy is naturally divisible into three parts. The first is the announcement of a rapidly approaching day of judgment upon the nations, especially upon Judah, and occupies chapter 1. The second consists of a hortatory appeal, based upon the foregoing decree of judgment and the further prophecy that the heathen powers of the four quarters of the earth shall be overthrown. This part extends from chapter

2:1 to 3:7. The third part completes the book (chap. 3: 8–20), and consists of a glorious promise of restoration and salvation to the remnant of Israel who are true to Jahveh. These sections embody the three great elements of apocalyptic prophecy, namely, the proclamation of judgment, admonition and encouragement for such as will hear God's word, and the glorious purpose of the Most High to redeem unto himself a holy people and thereby vindicate his administration of the world, and magnify his name.

The following translation exhibits the prophecy under the form of short but quite regular and harmonious parallelisms. The first section falls into six strophes of nearly equal length, presenting so many different phases of the approaching day of wrath. The admonition which follows is divided into the same number of strophes, consisting of so many various arguments and appeals. The third section contains the promise, in four strophes, which present so many different aspects of the future restoration and joy.

THE DECREE OF JUDGMENT. CHAP. I.

I.

- ² Gathering I will sweep everything away
From off the surface of the ground, saith Jahveh.
- ³ I will sweep off both man and beast,
Sweep fowls of heaven, and fishes of the sea,
And things that cause the wicked to stumble;
And I will cut off the whole race of man
From off the surface of the ground, saith Jahveh.

II.

- ⁴ And over Judah I will stretch my hand,
And on all dwellers in Jerusalem,
And cut off Baal's remnant from this place,
The name of idol-priests along with the priests,

² *Gathering . . . sweep*:—Two words of different origin and meaning, combined here so as to express not only intensity of action, but also the two-fold idea of gathering together for judgment and then sweeping them away into destruction.

³ *Things that cause*:—Probable reference to idols.

⁴ *Idol-priests*:—Comp. 2 Kings 23: 5.

- ⁵ And those that on the roofs bow to heaven's host,
And those that bow down, those that swear to Jahveh,
And those that swear by Milcom,
- ⁶ And those that turn away from Jahveh back,
And who have not sought Jahveh, nor inquired of him.

III.

- ⁷ Hush, in the presence of the Lord Jahveh!
For near at hand is Jahveh's day,
For Jahveh has prepared a sacrifice,
Has sanctified the ones whom he has called.
- ⁸ And in the day of Jahveh's sacrifice,
I'll visit on the princes and king's sons,
And on all them that clothe in foreign garb,
- ⁹ And visit all who leap o'er thresholds in that day,
Who fill their lord's house full of force and fraud.

IV.

- ¹⁰ And it shall be in that day, Jahveh saith,
A voice of crying shall rise from the fish-gate,
And lamentation from the second ward,
And a great crashing ruin from the hills.
- ¹¹ Lament, O ye that in the Mortar dwell,

⁵ *Roofs*:—Comp. Jer. 19: 13. *Milcom*—The worship of this god of the Ammonites had been made familiar in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11: 5, 7; 2 Kings 23: 13). The decree is against those that swear both by Jahveh and Milcom, not recognizing any important distinction.

⁷ *Sacrifice*:—Slaughter of his enemies. Comp. Isaiah 34: 6-8. *Sanctified*—Set apart and made ready to execute his decrees. Comp. Isaiah 10: 5, 6; 13: 3.

⁸ *King's sons*:—No necessary reference here to Josiah's sons in particular. *Foreign garb*—Costumes adopted from foreign nations.

⁹ *Leap thresholds*:—Enter houses violently, as do those who plunder or collect dues by sheer force. The reference is not to the superstition mentioned in 1 Sam. 5: 5, but to the exactions of the rich and noble, who ground the faces of the poor by requiring these toll-gatherers to collect by force if necessary. Comp. Isaiah 3: 14, 15. These minions of the rich filled their lord's houses with the product of their violence and fraud.

¹⁰ *Second ward*:—A well known quarter of the city. Comp. 2 Kings 22: 14. The wailing from various parts of the city, and the crashing ruin wrought by a desolating army on the hills about the city, furnish a fearful picture of destructive judgment.

¹¹ *Mortar*:—Name of some depression, or hollow within the city, probably

For all the Canaan-people are destroyed,
Cut off are all the silver-laden ones.

- ¹² And in that day I'll search Jerusalem with lamps,
And visit on the men stiff on their lees,
Those who are saying in their hearts,
Jahveh will neither good nor evil do.
¹³ And for a plunder shall their substance be,
Also their houses for a desolation;
And houses they shall build and not inhabit,
Plant vineyards and not drink the wine thereof.

V.

- ¹⁴ Near is the day of Jahveh, the great day,
'Tis near and hastening speedily along,
The sound of Jahveh's day!
Bitterly waileth there the mighty man.
¹⁵ A day of pouring fury is that day,
A day of cramping pressure and distress,
A day of noisy wreck and ruin dire,
A day of darkness and calamity,
A day of cloud and dense obscurity,
¹⁶ A day of trumpets and of war-alarm,
Upon the cities that are fortified,
And on the lofty battlements.

VI.

- ¹⁷ And I will bring a pressure upon men,
And they shall walk like those who cannot see.
For against Jahveh they have sinned.
And their blood shall be poured out like the dust,
And their full bodies even as rolls of dung.
¹⁸ Nor will their silver nor their gold have power
To save them in the day of Jahveh's wrath,

in the Tyropoeon valley. *Canaan-people*—Not here put for people of Canaanite origin, but of Canaanitish character and qualities, idolatrous, and especially given to traffic. Comp. Isaiah 23 : 8 ; Hos. 12 : 8 ; Prov. 31 : 24.

¹² *Stiff on their lees* :—Metaphor referring to old wine which has not been drawn off in a long time ; figure expressive of religious ease and indifference.

¹⁴ *There* :—Where the noise and destruction sweep along. Comp. the vivid conception of the day of Jahveh in Joel 1 : 15-2 : 11 ; Isaiah 13 : 6-16 ; Amos 5 : 18-20.

And in the fire of his zeal shall all the earth be eaten,
For a consumption, yea a fearful doom,
Shall he work on all dwellers of the earth.

THE ADMONITION. CHAP. II. 1-III. 7.

I.

- ch. 2 : ¹ Gather yourselves together, gather ye,
O nation not an object of desire.
² Before the time appointed bringeth forth,
[Before] the day like chaff has passed,
Ere yet comes on you Jahveh's burning wrath,
Ere yet comes on you Jahveh's day of wrath.
³ Seek Jahveh, all ye humble of the earth,
Ye who his judgments have performed ;
Seek righteousness, seek ye humility,
Perhaps ye may be hidden in Jahveh's day of wrath.

II.

- ⁴ For Gaza shall deserted be,
And Ashkelon become a desolation,
Ashdod, at noon-day they shall drive her out,
And Ekron shall be rooted up.
⁵ Ho ! Dwellers of the portion by the sea,
Nations of Cretes, on you is Jahveh's word ;
O Canaan, country of the Philistines,
Thee I destroy without inhabitant.
⁶ And it shall be—the portion by the sea—
Dwellings of shepherd's caves and folds of flocks.

ch. 2 : ¹ *Gather*—Best understood as a call to penitence and prayer much as Joel 1 : 14 and 2 : 15, 16. *Desire*—Israel is called a "nation not desired" because of having forfeited the yearning love of God by sin, and so becoming an object of loathing rather than of desire. It is better thus to adhere to the meaning which the word *kasaph* has in every other passage where it is found than to attach to it the sense of *shame* or *turned white*, or *pale*, which has no sanction in the usage of the language.

⁴ *Gaza . . . Ekron*—The writer constructs a paronomasia on these names by the words translated *deserted* and *rooted up*, after the manner of Micah 1 : 10-15.

⁵ *Cretes*—Ancient name of inhabitants of Philistia, but why so called uncertain. The most plausible conjecture is that there was some historic or traditional connection of the Philistines with Crete. Comp. Amos 9 : 7.

⁶ *Caves*—Dug-outs occupied by shepherds. Others explain the word as meaning *pastures* or *meadows* occupied by the shepherds.

⁷ And it shall be a portion for the remnant of the house of Judah ;

Upon them they shall graze at morning time,
At eve they will lie down at Ashkelon ;
For Jahveh, their own God, will visit them,
And bring their captives back again.

III.

⁸ I have been hearing the reproach of Moab,
And the revilings of the sons of Ammon,
Who have upon my people cast reproach
And acted proudly on their boundary.

⁹ Therefore as I live, saith Jahveh, Israel's God,
'Tis sure that Moab shall like Sodom be,
And the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah ;
The property of thorns and pits of salt,
And desolation to eternity.

The remnant of my people shall spoil them,
My nation's residue inherit them.

¹⁰ This shall be to them for their haughtiness,
For they reproached and acted with great pride
Against the people of Jahveh of hosts.

¹¹ Terrible is Jahveh upon them,
For he has thinned away gods of the earth ;
And they shall worship him, each from his place,
All islands of the nations.

IV.

¹² Also ye, Ethiopians,
The slain of my sword are they.

¹³ And he will stretch his hand upon the north,
And cause Assyria to perish,

⁷ *At morning time*—Read *beboger* instead of *bebhati*. This very simple emendation restores the parallelism which the common reading has destroyed.

⁸ *Their boundary*—My people's border, always a matter of contention between the Ammonites and Israel. Comp. Amos 1 : 13. Jer. 49 : 1. and Judges 11 : 24.

¹¹ *Upon them*—Reference to Moab and Ammon. *Thinned away*—Caused to disappear. *From his place*—Not *in* his place, as if remaining there, contrary to the idea of chap. 3 : 10 ; Micah 4 : 1. And Zech. 14 : 16 ; but thronging *from* the place ; pouring forth thence. Comp. Micah 7 : 17. *Islands*—Comp. Isaiah 41 : 1 ; 42 : 4 ; 51 : 5 ; 60 : 9 ; 66 : 19.

And will make Nineveh a desolation,
A dryness like the desert.

- ¹⁴ And in her midst shall flocks lie down,
All kinds of animal-nations,
Also the pelican and porcupine;
Among her capitals shall they repose;
A voice will in the window sing,
A desolation be upon the threshold;
For naked has he laid the cedar-work.

- ¹⁵ This is the city, the exulting one,
She that is dwelling in security,
She that is saying in her heart,
I am, and there is nothing more;
How has she a deserted waste become,
A place for beasts to lie!
And every one who passes over her,
Will hiss, will wave his hand in scorn.

V.

- ch. 3: ¹ Ho, the rebellious and polluted one,
The city that oppresses;
² She has not listened to a voice,
She has not received discipline,
In Jahveh she has not put confidence,
Unto her God she has not closely come.
³ Her princes in her midst are roaring lions,
Her judges evening wolves,
They do not for the morning leave the bones;

¹⁴ *Animal-nation*—Literally, *every animal-nation*; nation here in the sense of tribe or class. Comp. Joel 1: 6. Prov. 30: 25-27. *Pelican and porcupine*—These are fittingly named as given to frequent marshy and waste places. Comp. Isaiah 14: 23. *A voice*—The singing of birds generally, not of any particular kind of bird or singer. *Naked . . . cedar-work*—The palatial buildings are thought of as so torn down and exposed as to lay bare the costly cedar-work of the interior apartments.

3: 1. *Rebellious one*—Jerusalem. Having pointed to sweeping judgments to fall on the heathen powers of the west, east, south and north (chap. 2: 4-15), the prophet directs his word of admonition to Jerusalem again, and shows that her many sins call for a like judicial doom.

³ *Leave the bones*—They are so ravenous that they devour all their prey in the evening, and so leave nothing until the morning,

- ⁴ Her prophets boasters, men of treacheries,
Her priests stained what is holy, broke the law.
⁵ Jahveh is righteous in the midst of her,
He will not do a wrong;
Morning by morning he will give his judgment to the light;
He fails not, but wrong-doers know not shame.

VI.

- ⁶ I have cut nations off; their towers are waste,
I have destroyed their streets so no one passes,
Razed are their cities, no man there, no dweller;
⁷ I said, "Only fear me; take discipline,"
And so her dwelling would not be cut off,
All which I have appointed upon her;
But they in haste corrupted all their deeds.

THE PROMISE. CHAP. III. 8-20.

I.

- ⁸ Therefore do ye wait for me, Jahveh saith,
Unto the day when I rise for the prey;
For 'tis my judgment to assemble nations,
That I may gather kingdoms together,
To pour my indignation upon them,
Even all the burning fury of my wrath;
For in the fire of my jealousy
Devoured shall all the earth be.
⁹ For then to peoples' pure lip will I turn,
That all of them may call on Jahveh's name,
To serve him with one shoulder.

⁵ *Jahveh . . . righteous*—The divine administration is contrasted with the people's sinfulness. He will not do a wrong act, but manifest his holy judgments in ever increasing light. Comp. Deut. 32 : 4.

⁶⁻⁷ *I have cut off . . . I said*—The perfections of these two verses point to the already completed acts of the divine administration, on which Jahveh bases his admonition and appeal; and also to the persistent sinfulness of the people of Jerusalem, which justified the sweeping judgment about to come.

⁹ *Pure lip*—Pure language as expressive of the purity of the popular life. The peoples will be converted to purity of heart, thought, life and act, and all this will find expression through the lips. *With one shoulder*—With united strength as of many putting their shoulders together under one yoke or burden.

- ¹⁰ Beyond the streams of Ethiopia,
My suppliants, daughter of my scattered ones,
Shall bear mine offering.

II.

- ¹¹ That day thou wilt not blush for all thy deeds
Which thou hast been transgressing against me;
For then will I remove out of thy midst
Those of thine that exult in arrogance,
And thou shalt no more be set high in pride
Within the mountain of my holiness.
- ¹² And I will leave a remnant in thy midst,
A people lowly and impoverished,
And they shall put their trust in Jahveh's name.
- ¹³ Israel's remnant will not commit wrong,
And they will not be speaking what is false,
Nor in their mouth will tongue of guile be found;
For they will pasture and lie down to rest,
And no one making them afraid.

III.

- ¹⁴ Daughter of Zion, utter shouts of joy,
Send forth a cry of gladness, Israel,
Be merry and exult with all the heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁵ Jahveh thy judgment has removed,
He has turned off thy enemy.
The King of Israel, Jahveh, is in thee,
No longer shalt thou see calamity.
- ¹⁶ That day be it said to Jerusalem, fear not;
O Zion, do not let thy hands hang down.

¹⁰ *Daughter of my scattered ones*—Those begotten in the uttermost parts of the earth (as Ethiopia) by God's people who have been dispersed thither. These are thought of as converts to the true religion, and bringing offerings to Jahveh.

¹¹ *Wilt not blush*—Because there will be no disgraceful deeds to blush for.

¹² *Remnant*—This remnant is that same kernel of righteousness, which is ever seen by the prophets to survive the chastening judgments; a lowly, poor, often down-trodden class (Comp. 1 Cor. 1 : 16), who trust God and are cared for as the sheep of a good shepherd.

- ¹⁷ Jahveh, thy God in thee, strong One, will save,
 He will be leaping over thee with joy,
 He will be deeply silent in his love,
 He will with gladness over thee exult.

IV.

- ¹⁸ Those grieving for the festal time I gathered,
 From thee they were, on whom reproach was cast.
¹⁹ Lo, I will deal with all thy despots then,
 And I will succor that which lamely halts,
 And that which was thrust out will I collect.
 And I will set them for a praise and name
 In all the earth, where they have suffered shame.
²⁰ In that time I will cause you to come in,
 Yea, in the time of my collecting you;
 For I will give you for a name and praise
 Among all peoples of the earth,
 When I restore your captives to your eyes, saith Jahveh.

¹⁷ *Strong one*—Mighty hero; in apposition with Jahveh. *Leaping with joy*—Figure of exquisite delight. *Silent in his love*—Noticeable counterpart of the active exultation. His joy is not merely that of outward glee, but rooted in that purest love which is silent because of its depth.

¹⁸ *Grieving*—Those who were sad by reason of removal from the appointed festivals so that they could not attend. To gather these home is to end their sorrow. *From thee*—From Israel; they were of God's people. *On whom*—The relative refers to this same people, over whom there was so many times a lifting up of reproach.

¹⁹ *Thy despots*—The oppressors who acted the tyrant over the Israel of God.